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# Hip Hip 101: A University Level Course Curriculum For Examining Hip Hop In The Modern World

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HIP-HOP 101:  
A UNIVERSITY LEVEL COURSE CURRICULUM FOR EXAMINING HIP-HOP IN  
THE MODERN WORLD

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Geography

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

David Ma

December 2010

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

HIP-HOP 101:  
A UNIVERSITY LEVEL COURSE CURRICULUM FOR EXAMINING HIP-HOP IN  
THE MODERN WORLD

by

David Ma

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2010

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## ABSTRACT

### HIP-HOP 101: A UNIVERSITY LEVEL COURSE CURRICULUM FOR EXAMINING HIP-HOP IN THE MODERN WORLD

by David Ma

This thesis is a course curriculum designed for classroom use at the upper-division university level. The course examines the maturation and importance of hip-hop with an emphasis on its worldwide, societal implications. It includes various forms of media and daily lesson plans to guide instructors. Furthermore, the thesis also serves as a primer on the subject of hip-hop culture, its music, and history.

The course offers a chronological assessment of hip-hop's progression, while examining various issues regarding race, class, violence, and gender. Seminal materials in the field will be utilized and presented as part of the pedagogy, including landmark books, music, films, and other media. The lesson plans are presented in a manner that logically transitions from one historical benchmark to the next. Material presented early in the course is less advanced, less well developed, and necessitates deeper analysis as the course progresses. Surface level questions and information gradually builds towards higher-level thinking assessments.

The thesis was produced with the belief that hip-hop is a unique American phenomenon with complex implications that should be examined in the modern, multi-media manner that other longstanding disciplines are afforded.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This SJSU master's thesis is the product of many individuals and departments that have lent their time, name, and open-mindedness to the project. The thesis itself was completed under the Interdisciplinary Studies graduate program, making it a truly collaborative effort between professors and their respective departments, namely the Department of Music, Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science, Department of Intercultural Communication, Department of African American Studies, Department of History, Department of Geography, and the College of Education. These departments have all been generous in their willingness to guide, aid, and view this project through frameworks of their respective disciplines and paradigmatic approaches.

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Finally, an additional thanks to the chair of the thesis committee, Dr. M. Kathryn Davis, for her steady calm and unflinching guidance in ensuring the project's completion. This couldn't have been possible without her effort and support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
COURSE PROLOGUE.....	3
SAMPLE COURSE SYLLABUS.....	5
A PRIMER ON HIP-HOP.....	13
WEEK 1.....	23
WEEK 2.....	27
WEEK 3 (UNIT 1: GRAFITTI).....	34
WEEK 4.....	38
WEEK 5 (UNIT 2: BREAKDANCING).....	42
WEEK 6.....	45
WEEK 7 (MIDTERM EXAMINATION).....	50
WEEK 8 (UNIT 3: RAPPING UNIT).....	55
WEEK 9.....	60
WEEK 10 (UNIT 4: TURNTABLISM).....	65
WEEK 11.....	69
WEEK 12.....	74
WEEK 13 [FINAL EXAMINATION].....	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	85

## INTRODUCTION

*Hip-Hop 101: A University Level Course Curriculum For Examining Hip-Hop in the Modern World* traces hip-hop from its 1970s origins in the Bronx, New York to its position worldwide, focusing on historical progression as well as examining important social issues embedded in the culture and music. Students will be presented an array of important films, audio, and readings that will enhance their understanding of the culture and its importance.

It is imperative to examine hip-hop at this point in time for myriad reasons. Similar to studying any major cultural movement, the study of hip-hop gives context to the times in which it was developed. For example, one can gain perspective on local political and social conditions by simply hearing early recordings and dissecting lyrical content—while hip-hop is not the only genre that allows this, it is the only genre that reflects poverty stricken, early 1970s Bronx, New York. While hip-hop itself has its own chronology, it also gives context to its surrounding history—a history that encompasses racial tensions, government policies, media, poverty, progressive mindsets, and much more beyond the music itself.

Presently, scholars claim we are living in a “Hip-Hop Generation,” and increasingly universities are receptive to hip-hop-related literature and media<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the need for an in-depth course on hip-hop is paramount and logical, if university departments are to embrace modernity and react to trends in student learning. Hip-hop culture and its continuous growth is an advantageous tool for exploring many issues that may not be as apparent in other disciplines. By learning how hip-hop

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. (New York: St. Martin's Press. 2005). Introduction.



developed and its various incarnations through the last few decades, we are also able to discuss issues of race, gender, homophobia, violence, class, and social and political power structures as well as to critique American culture itself.

In addition, exploring hip-hop is of value due to its multi-culturalism and popularity among varied demographics. Surely, it would be a course that would garner high enrollment in addition to its obvious value as a teaching tool. In teaching hip-hop, instructors must be interdisciplinary, allowing room for different approaches, which will only benefit pedagogy in the long run.

The following curriculum serves to present a history of hip-hop and is designed for instructors to use as a basic format for teaching such a course. It furthermore entails the use of important multi-media that is fun, gripping, and in some cases, just now available for use.

It is surely of value to study anything that has had such a major cultural influence—Not many cultural movements continue to thrive so globally and so persistently as hip-hop. Universities study rock and roll, jazz, and an array of topics simply because they shape the cultures in which they emerged. Hip-hop is no different than that, and there is no better time than now to study it.

## COURSE PROLOGUE

The following pages entail a brief primer and literature review on hip-hop in addition to actual course lesson plans. Included here are caveats and logistical details for clarification as well as the actual daily procedures.

The term “hip-hop” itself is used interchangeably throughout with the term “rap.” While cultural participants and scholars have made distinctions between these terms, there remain enough ambiguity and parallels to interchange the two. Hip-hop is used when describing the actual music and its makers, as well as the culture itself.

The coursework is arranged into a 13 week, 3-hour course that meets once per week. Lessons can be divided up accordingly to fit various academic calendars. Sessions are sectioned into hourly blocks to ensure that adjustments, either truncating or prolonging of lessons, could be made with relative ease.

Each class session (except the first) begins with questions directly related to the previous week’s readings. All lectures are held at the start of each session, followed by assessment, discussion, writing, and/or presentation of media. The lesson plans are presented in a manner that develops student learning while logically transitioning from one topic to the next. For example, discussion questions in the early stages of the course will be surface level and less involved but gradually build towards higher order thinking and discussion. Additional reading materials and supplemental tools will also follow this format.

In the 13 weeks, there are four major components in which the course is divided, all of which correspond to what are considered the “Four Elements of Hip-Hop:”

breakdancing, MCing, DJing, and graffiti. Participants, artists, and scholars have historically sectioned hip-hop into four pillars, each intersecting each other while existing as their own medium. While the time spent on each section will differ based on the necessity for deeper analysis, the four sections guide the organization of the course.

Furthermore, lessons that refer to audio or visual aids will not be included in this thesis as a physical CD or graphic template. Most of the materials used—films, audio, and images—are works that are readily available. Additionally, the course will examine films, literature, and audio considered paramount in the exploration and documentation of hip-hop culture.

## **SAMPLE COURSE SYLLABUS**

**University Name**

**School/Department**

**Course Number, Title, Section, Semester, and Year**

**Instructor:**

**Office Location:**

**Telephone:**

**Email:**

**Office Hours:**

**Class Days/Time:**

**Classroom:**

**Prerequisites:**

**GE Studies Category:**

**Course Fees:**

### **Course Description**

Through various media, films, discussion, readings, and literature, Hip-Hop 101 presents the history of hip-hop while exploring various issues pertaining to its worldwide impact. It will examine the major historical conditions of Bronx, New York in the early 1970s in from which hip-hop and its subsequent culture arose. Pioneers of the movement, early music it produced, and its various complexities will also be presented. The elements of hip-hop—Grafitti, MCing, DJing, and Breakdancing—will be explored in detail in how it pertains to the culture and its overall importance. Various societal issues within hip-hop will be thoroughly examined: issues of race, sexuality, class, authenticity, violence, gender, and censorship will be introduced. The course will also take a look at world

regions that currently house thriving, indigenous hip-hop scenes. We will round out the course by exploring hip-hop's global impact and how it has developed thus far as an art form that is reaching the 40-year-old mark.

### **Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives**

Through class discussions, essays, short essay assignments, in-class assignments, a midterm, and a final examination, students will become familiarized with hip-hop culture: the people, the places, specific music, and important benchmarks that have made it a global culture. Students will also understand the connection and lineage between hip-hop and African American music. By the course's end, students will recognize key figures, see the progression of the culture, and be familiar with various complex issues that plague the culture. And finally, students will understand hip-hop's impact on greater society, and the world, as a whole.

### **Required Texts/Readings**

**Cepeda, Raquel. *And It Don't Stop: The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism Of The Last 25 Years*. Faber and Faber. 2004.**

- Edited by Rachel Cepeda is a writer for New York's The Village Voice, a local news, art and culture publication featuring essays written over the last 25 years on topics surrounding hip-hop. Notable writers like Nelson George, Bill Adler, Harry Allen, and Greg Tate were young journalists covering New York during the early 1980s and their contributions reflect hip-hop's growth and history, as well as the public reaction to it at the time. Through short essays, the book covers issues of race, violence, misogyny, gender, censorship, prejudice, and more. It touches on historical junctures (included is the first ever published article on breakdancing) and also deals with newer, more recent

issues (East Coast vs. West Coast rivalry). *And It Don't Stop* offers historical information and parallels the other course reading, *Hip Hop Matters*, in many ways.

**Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History Of The Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 2005.**

- *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of The Hip-Hop Generation* by Jeff Chang, one of the foremost scholars on the topic, grapples with issues surrounding hip-hop while offering a very detailed, vibrant history of the movement. Written in 2005, it chronologically traces hip-hop's rise from inner city Bronx, New York to the modern day. It includes profiles of hip-hop's main pioneers, Clive 'Kool Herc' Campbell, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa. The book, in fact, begins with a foreword by Kool Herc himself, the man many credit with starting hip-hop at its most basic level. *Can't Stop Won't Stop* is more than a 'history of hip-hop' book, but rather, it contextualizes hip-hop within the surrounding history of New York and early 1970s America. It also examines the many trends and transitions hip-hop went through over the last few decades (i.e. Afrocentric rap, gangsta rap, indie rap, etc.). While it praises hip-hop for its polyculturalism, unifying properties, and importance as an art form, it does not dismiss the responsibility of the artists for their vulgar and violent language, the messages it sends, nor the negativity heard in the music. Moreover, it cites important hip-hop artists such as Ice Cube and Public Enemy whose albums were huge in the 1990s, a decade that many credit as the best and worst time for hip-hop. From hip-hop's inception to all the political and social fallout due to it, the book examines all eras in a stark, blunt manner. *Can't Stop Won't Stop* is the ideal textbook for a course like this, which is why it is the foundational

reading of the course. In the coming years (if not already), *Can't Stop Won't Stop* will likely be the definitive primer regarding hip-hop culture.

**Watkins, Craig. *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and The Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. Beacon Press. 2005.**

*-Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* contends that hip-hop is a vital source of creativity and industry for youth, one that is spectacular cultural movement committed to defying the cultural and political mainstream. If Cepeda's book presents historical evidence of hip-hop's early years, Watkins' book assesses hip-hop's current state. He often draws on the irony of hip-hop, contending that its livelihood depends almost entirely on its ability to sell Black Death and requires its performers to portray themselves in a world of 'urban villainy'. He also surveys communities, constituencies, and currents that make-up the movement, introducing readers to Kwame Kilpatrick, the self-billed hip-hop mayor of Detroit, a figure that embodies extremes positives and negatives associated with hip-hop. He also draws extensively on a wide-ranging interview with Minister Louis Farrakhan and his opinion of rapper Ja Rule's rivalry with rapper 50 Cent, examining the message their negative posturing sends. This reading is a balanced review of hip-hop's current issues, as it criticizes the culture and, at the same time, defends it against uninformed criticisms.

### **Required Films/Viewings**

**Modulations: Cinema For The Ear. Dir. Iara Lee. Caipirina Productions. 1998.**

*- Modulations: Cinema For The Ear* covers the history of electronic based music.

Through interviews with various pioneers of the field, both US musicians and internationally renowned artists, the film explains how the use of electronic devices has

been used to alter and manipulate music for decades. The portion of the film most relevant for our use covers hip-hop DJs, the history of turntables, its infusion into hip-hop culture, and its Jamaican roots. Since the most celebrated and respected hip-hop DJs are mostly Asian Americans, the film will be used to highlight the roles of Asians in hip-hop. Visually and musically, excerpts from the film will be shown and used in classroom instruction throughout the semester.

**Wild Style. Dir. Charlie Ahearn. Rhino. 1982.**

- *Wild Style*, a fictional film from 1982 based around the topics of graffiti and breakdancing. Directed by Charlie Ahearn, it is largely considered the first hip-hop movie ever made, featuring some of the early DJs, graffiti artists, dancers, rappers and partygoers of the scene. The film is fictional but features real persons, offering early glimpses of Bronx, New York, and its music. It also entails early scenes of break dancing and is used to introduce various components of the course throughout.

**Style Wars. Dir. Tony Silver. New York. PBS.1983.**

- This documentary film originally ran for PBS and is often considered the definitive early film exploring hip-hop culture. Although it focuses primarily on New York graffiti during the late 1970s and early 1980s, it entails breakdancing, DJing and rapping, making it a valuable tool when shown in the classroom. It depicts urban youths, their worldviews, and America's reaction towards the hip-hop as it was growing. The movie features interviews with New York City Mayor Ed Koch as well as many persons who would later be recognized as legitimate artists and performers. In addition, early hip-hop produced in the early 1980s is heard throughout the film. It is an important document of



hip-hop's beginnings and is something that will be referenced many times during the course and will be shown in full.

### **Classroom Protocol**

Students are expected to arrive to class on time and be familiar with the week's assigned reading. Lack of attendance will greatly impact your grade as will lack of participation during activities and discussions. Students are expected to remain quiet when: A) The instructor is speaking, B) A classmate is speaking and C) When audio or visual examples are played. Cell phones are to be turned off.

### **Dropping and Adding**

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. Students are to be aware of current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

### **Assignments and Grading Policy**

- In-class assignments: 200 points
- Discussion and participation: 200 points
- Miscellaneous assignments: 100 points
- Mid-term examination: 100 points
- Final Examination: 100 points

### **University Policies:**

### **Need For Special Accommodations**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability please notify the instructor at once that you are registered with the Disability Resource Center [DRC] and you will be assisted.

### **Drop Policy**

If you decide that this class simply is not an ideal fit for your studies, be aware that it is your responsibility to formally withdraw before **[said date]** or a permanent marker will become part of your record.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

Your commitment to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at this university. This University's Academic Integrity Policy requires that you be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs when plagiarism, cheating or any other forms of dishonesty take place regarding submitted material.

*Schedule is subject to change with fair notice and how the notice will be made available.*

**Table 1 Course Schedule**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</b>
1		Course introduction and explanation of main reading materials. Selected audio works will be played. Discussion. Begin Chang book up to page 86.
2		Lecture, discussion, film clip from <i>Brasilintime</i> and turntable demonstration. Introduction of 'Hip-Hop's Four Elements'. Read Chang pgs. 89-109 and 'Africa Bambaataa's Hip-Hop' from Cepeda.
3		Discussion. Short lecture and introduction of the 'Graffiti' element. Watch film, <i>Style Wars</i> . Discussion. Read Chang 109-167. Bring Cepeda book to class.
4		Discussion short lecture. Wrap-up our 'Graffiti' unit. In-class reading assignment. Read Chang pgs. 167-231. Bring Cepeda book

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		to class.
5		Discussion. Begin unit on 'breakdancing'. Watch film <i>Planet B-Boy</i> . Take home write-up about said film. No readings this week.
6		Discussion and share write-ups in small groups. Film clips of various breakdancing styles. Prepare for next week's midterm examination.
7		Wrap-up 'breakdancing' unit. Discussion, preparation, clarification. Midterm. Read Chang pgs 231-299.
8		Review mid-term exam. Lecture and introduction of the 'Rapping or MCing' element. Listening exercise. Read Chang 299-357. Bring Cepeda book to next session.
9		Discussion and chronological continuation of listening exercise. Lecture, and in-class writing exercise. Wrap up 'Rapping' unit. Read Chang 357-437.
10		Discussion. Introduction of 'DJing or Turntablism' unit. Watch film <i>Scratch</i> . Finish Chang book. Book review assignment due next session. Bring Watkins and Cepeda book to class
11		Discussion. Wrap-up 'DJing' unit. Summarize, clarify, and reiterate the interconnectedness of all 'Four Elements'. In-class reading and discussion of selected readings from Cepeda and Watkins. Discussion and examination of negative issues within hip-hop. Read selected portions of Watkins book for homework.
12		Discussion of final readings. Listening exercise related to final examination. Examination of positives within hip-hop. Prep for Final examination.
13		Discussion, clarification, brief final prep. Handout final examination. Closing lecture.

## A PRIMER ON HIP-HOP

Hip-hop developed in the South Bronx of New York City in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The term “rap” is often used synonymously with “hip-hop,” yet hip-hop normally denotes the practices of an entire subculture. Hip-hop, or rap, is a musical genre developed as part of hip-hop culture and defined by four key stylistic elements: rapping, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti—all of which are foundational pillars through which participation and expression of hip-hop are conducted.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1970s when block parties were increasingly popular in New York City, African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx incorporated disc jockeys (DJs), also called ‘DJs’ into these large outdoor gatherings. The DJs primarily played musical genres of funk, disco, and soul. These genres typically had segments in the musical arrangement where only percussion could be heard. Due to the positive reception during these musical segments, which are called “breaks,” DJs began isolating and playing only these portions. This early technique was first invented by Clive “Kool Herc” Campbell, a Jamaican-born DJ.<sup>3</sup>

Campbell’s Jamaican roots are a direct lineage to hip-hop culture in many ways. Social and political conditions in Jamaica during the 1960s largely mirrored the South Bronx: low unemployment, gang warfare, and astounding rates of poverty. There was also what was known as the Jamaican Soundsystem<sup>4</sup>, a technique in which two large record players were interconnected, playing loud records as a vocalist often spoke over

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<sup>2</sup> Chang 45.

<sup>3</sup> Chang 56.

<sup>4</sup> Stas Bekman: stas (at) stason.org. “What is “Dub” music anyway? (Reggae)”. Stason.org. <http://stason.org/TULARC/music-genres/reggae-dub/3-What-is-Dub-music-anyway-Reggae.html>. Retrieved 2009-01-12.

the audio. This laid the foundation for hip-hop music, spreading to New York City via its substantial Jamaican immigrant community from which Campbell emerged, practiced, and further developed through the early 1970s.

The simple yet effective method of isolating ‘breaks’ and having a speaker—called the Master of Ceremonies or MC—talk over the music is fundamental to what is now known as rap music. These same techniques contributed to the evolution of eventual complete rap songs, as turntable methodology became more sophisticated and complex.<sup>5</sup>

Rappers progressed in form and style, varying their vocal and rhythmic delivery, incorporating brief rhyme, often with a sexual or scatological theme in an effort to differentiate themselves while entertaining the audience. Thus rapping and DJing were among the first progressive actions that occurred in hip-hop culture, followed by one of hip-hop’s first popularized elements, graffiti.

Graffiti, a form of expression that has existed in many forms and cultures was also practiced by New York City gangs in the early 1970s, making New York the epicenter of graffiti innovation.<sup>6</sup> It came to a boiling point when TAKI 183, an influential graffiti writer, added the numbers 183 from his address on 183rd Street in Washington Heights. He worked as a foot messenger in New York City, writing his nickname on streets he frequented. On July 21, 1971, The New York Times ran an article entitled “Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals”, spurring competitive vandalism as graffiti writers began adding their street number to their monikers.<sup>7</sup> They mostly wrote on subway cars in various yet simple styles. Elaborate forms of lettering eventually grew,

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<sup>5</sup> Chang 231.

<sup>6</sup> Style Wars, Dir. Tony Silver. New York. PBS.1983.

<sup>7</sup> Chang 198.

fusing with hip-hop music and bridging both elements. Graffiti is recognized as a visual expression of rap music, just as breakdancing is viewed as a physical expression.<sup>8</sup>

The other element of hip-hop is breakdancing, an acrobatic and pulsating style of dance, also developed in the South Bronx as other elements of hip-hop were evolving. The "B" in B-boy stands for 'break', as in 'break-boy' (or 'break girl'). The term 'B-boy' originated from the dancers at DJ Kool Herc's parties who danced in correlation with the 'break' portion of the music, often in distinctive, frenetic styles. Prior to the 1980s, hip-hop culture was largely confined to in the United States. However, during the 1980s, it spread internationally, becoming popular in dozens of countries. In the early part of the decade, B-boying became the first aspect of hip-hop culture to reach Germany, Japan, Australia and South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

What began as a cultural movement spawned out of disenfranchisement created a musical genre with cultural sub-genres. Hip-hop is currently a worldwide phenomenon, roughly 40 years old, and continues to thrive in mainstream popular culture. It has provided moments of utter abrasiveness and moments of profound artistry, entailing social, political, and racial complexities that both plague it and give it reverence.

A decade into the new millennium, hip-hop is a cultural staple seen in neighborhoods across America regardless of economic class, ethnicity, or gender, and is an identity younger generations continue to embrace. Scholars such as Guthrie P. Ramsey assert that hip-hop is a continuation of the African American experience; a musical history that evolved with jazz, soul, and R&B.

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<sup>8</sup> Jeff Chang. Total Chaos: The Art And Aesthetics Of Hip-Hop. (Berkeley: Perseus Publishing. 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Watkins, Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement. (Boston: Deacon Press. 2003) 54.

Ramsey is author of *Race Music: Black Cultures From Be Bop To Hip-Hop*, a book exploring how African American music—Jazz, Rhythm & Blues, Soul, Funk, Hip-Hop—reflect identities and histories within the African American community. He provides a sharp, chronological overview of African American music, profiling examples of artists and how cultural changes, from both interior and exterior, have impacted American culture.<sup>10</sup> And while hip-hop originated in inner-city neighborhoods among African American and Latino youth, its involvement today is multi-ethnic and international. It has become one of the most popular and most accessible forms of music, with burgeoning hip-hop scenes in regions across the globe, according to Patrick Neate, British author of *Where You At: Notes From The Frontline Of A Hip-Hop Planet*.<sup>11</sup>

*Where You At* looks at hip-hop's international development in places like Brazil, Japan, Korea, and South Africa. Neate examines and confirms how these cultures easily embraced hip-hop while focusing on their own cultural and social values. For instance, Japan's absorption of rap shows a liking toward hip-hop style and fashion, where as Brazilian hip-hop enthusiasts emphasize the percussive element more so than lyrics. Neate's assessment further proves that hip-hop can be, and has been, taken and calibrated into other cultures for their own respective reasons. This is ongoing, as unlikely places like Israel and Vietnam also have booming hip-hop movements that developed recently.

As hip-hop has grown, so has its critiques and negative reputation. Scholars, critics, and musicians have condemned it as untactful, hyper-masculine and over-sexed.

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<sup>10</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey. *Race Music: Black Cultures From Be Bop To Hip-Hop*. (Los Angeles: University Of California Press. 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Neate. *Where You're At: Notes From The Frontline Of A Hip-Hop Planet*. (New York: Riverhead Books. 2004).

While these criticisms may be true, there is no denying that we are currently living in a ‘Hip-Hop Generation’, as author and scholar Jeff Chang pointed out.<sup>12</sup>

From TV commercials, to styles of dress, to slang, dance choreography, and even mannerisms—many of these dynamics have been heavily influenced by hip-hop. President Obama has even been called the ‘First Hip-Hop President’ by the Chicago Tribune after citing many of rap recordings as being amongst his favorite songs<sup>13</sup>. In fact, after a debate in Philadelphia with Hilary Clinton, Obama referred to his opponent’s attacks on his campaign gaffes as something to ignore, proceeding to gesture wiping dust of his shoulders, a manneurism popularized by rapper Jay-Z’s song ‘Dirt On Your Shoulder’.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, when first lady Michelle Obama invited jazz musicians to perform at the White House, she stated that she wanted her daughters “to know that there is other music out there besides hip-hop.”<sup>15</sup> These recent examples from the current White House perhaps prove we are indeed in a ‘Hip-Hop Generation’.

As our current president has acknowledged hip-hop, so should academia. As a modern topic of study, hip-hop can be taught in various disciplines and university departments. From an African American Studies approach, for example, one can examine many racial and social themes. According to author Greg Tate, notions that were prevalent in Jazz, Soul and R&B— poverty, race, and inequality—seeped into hip-hop as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Chang 98.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Kot. “Barack Obama: The First Hip Hop President”. Chicago Tribune. 7 Nov. 2008.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Obama Dusts Dirt Off His Shoulders’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yel8IjOAdSc>

<sup>15</sup> A portion of Michelle Obama’s introduction speech when introducing Jazz performers at the Whitehouse, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, as seen on CNN.



Tate's known book, *Everything But The Burden*, is a collection of essays, short stories, interviews and poems that reinforces the idea how black art, its culture, slang and fashion has been taken and usurped in mainstream media.<sup>16</sup> Tate, a writer for New York's revered free weekly publication, The Village Voice, claims that much can be learned by examining how African American music evolved into hip-hop and what the music says about changes that occurred within the community.

Outside of an African American Studies course, tangents of hip-hop can be taught in other university departments as well. Some of its facets, such as negotiating politics of identity, have already been thoroughly researched in disciplines such as Communication. M. Hess explored how authenticity in hip-hop is tied directly to representations of African-American identity, stating that white rap artists have been in constant flux, negotiating their place within the hip-hop for years.<sup>17</sup>

Another discipline, Asian American Studies, has also examined hip-hop in recent years through relevant writings. The first, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture In Asian America* assesses the practices and consumption of Asian American art. A particular chapter, 'Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American Emcee', focuses on the history of Asian American rappers, dating back to the late 1970s and through the early 2000s.<sup>18</sup> It pays special attention to the ways in which certain Asian American rappers negotiate the challenge of authenticity as being non-black and non-white participants in hip-hop culture. In another chapter 'These Are The Breaks:

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<sup>16</sup> Greg Tate, Everything But The Burden. (New York: Broadway Books. 2003).

<sup>17</sup> M. Hess, "Hip-Hop Realness And The White Performer" Critical Studies in Media Communication (2006): 372-389.

<sup>18</sup> Nguyen, Mime and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu. Alien Encounters: Popular Culture In Asian America. (Minnesota: Duke Press. 2007).

Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections’, hip-hop is explored as symbolic space, art form, and/or territory that Asians and African Americans have often encountered one another, with positive and progressive results. Perhaps no other musical form in the world discusses race openly or as directly as hip-hop does and these growing trends in these university departments only bolsters it further.

Gender in hip-hop is also discussed, sometimes brutally open fashion. Since hip-hop is dominated by men—and perhaps as a result of—issues relating to women are relevant in any Women’s Studies course. Hip-hop (especially late 1990s hip-hop to the present) is plagued with an extremely violent, intolerant, and profound sexualization of women. Lyrics such as ‘Bitches ain’t shit but hoes and tricks’<sup>19</sup> have been popularized and repeated in many recordings, as women in music videos are continually shown as sex objects, nuisances, overtly promiscuous, or not promiscuous enough.

These damaging examples pertaining to women have recently been examined in an essay by Yuanyuan Zhang.<sup>20</sup> The essay, ‘An Examination of How Rap and R&B Music Videos Influence African American Self-Identity’ looks at various themes (sex and respect) within rap music videos and how they can have translated itself to black audiences. It also examines how misogyny is depicted and perhaps carried out in real life as well. Gender issues will likely continue as the music either deviates or dwells in these portrayals, perhaps causing young women whom listen to internalize these messages.

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<sup>19</sup>‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’ by Dr. Dre off the album *The Chronic* in 1992 has been referenced in later rap songs, such as ‘Pussy Ain’t Shit’ by Funkdoobiest and remade in 2005 by the Ben Folds Five.

<sup>20</sup>Yuanyuan, Zhang. “An Examination of How Rap and R&B Music Videos Influence African American Self-Identity” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 93rd Annual Convention,, Chicago, IL, Nov 15, 2007.

Hip-hop remains largely male-dominated but an entire Women's Studies course could be easily explored through hip-hop music and its treatment of women.

On a broad level, the possibilities of studying hip-hop in courses such as 'Hip-Hop And Race' or 'Gender Issues Within Hip-Hop' or 'The African American Experience Through Hip-Hop' or 'Multi-Culturalism And Hip-Hop', or just simply, 'Hip-Hop History' would allow departments to adapt their respective pedagogies to the subject matter rather easily. The possibilities are quite extensive.

Aside from university departments benefiting from hip-hop guided courses, instructors stand to gain much as well. There are now more media tools related to hip-hop than ever before, as audio and visual aids will only enhance pedagogy. Key visual aids, for example, Johan Kugelberg's *Born In The Bronx*, anthologizes hip-hop's baby steps, capturing the emergence of the culture through fashion, graffiti, show flyers, and authentic photographs.<sup>21</sup> Other recent visual items such as *The Book Of Hip Hop Cover Art* by Andrew Emery are fresh, provocative, and would surely add color to any lecture.<sup>22</sup> Emery's book consists of heralded artwork and cover-art used on famous rap records dating back to the early 1970s. It also briefly explores artistic trends of the time through images arranged chronologically. Both these items, for example, would be of service to any instructor and are now legitimate classroom tools, rather than mere ephemera, which it perhaps would have been considered a decade ago.

Even more moving and more practical than visual aides are the availability of hip-hop related films that can be used by instructors. These films are current as well as classic, both offering different perspectives due to how dated and how modern they are.

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<sup>21</sup> Johan Kugelberg Johan, *Born In The Bronx*. (New York. Rizolli Books. 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Emery, *The Book Of Hip-Hop Cover Art*. (London. Octopus Publishing. 2004).

For example, a 2007 documentary, *Brasilintime*, focuses on Brazilian musical history and certain Brazilian records that have been famously sampled in rap music by American DJs.<sup>23</sup> The film has a useful albeit brief introduction on Clive Campbell, his methods, and the history of a song called ‘Apache’ by the Incredible Bongo Band. The song was the most famous routine in Campbell’s performances and ended up being considered an anthem for breakdancers. Other films, such as *Beat Street*<sup>24</sup> or *Krush Groove*<sup>25</sup> capture images of early hip-hop as they were happening and are early documentation of its growth.

In due course, audio such as the above mentioned ‘Apache’ could be used in class session. In fact, a course such as this necessitates audio listening exercises. Lyrics new and old can be examined in correlation with whatever is being taught. Audio clips and examples of how certain songs have been interpolated into newer hip-hop would be fun, informative demonstrations. Current books covering classic rap albums, examining techniques, histories, and procedures behind the music will only aid these audio demonstrations. Brian Coleman’s *Check The Technique: Liner Notes For Hip-Hop Junkies* from 2007 for example, focuses on what are considered heralded hip-hop albums, covering 34 recordings dating back to as early as 1988, contextualizing not only each albums’ importance within its timeframe, but also interviews the artists behind the music. Audio utilized along with modern music books such as *Check the Technique* are simple yet effective tools at hand that can and should absolutely be used.

In closing, hip-hop is not a fad or immature songs made by violent, boastful, irresponsible artists. While this was the prevailing attitude in the 1990s, it has since

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<sup>23</sup> *Brasilintime*. Dir. Brian Cross. (Mochilla. Los Angeles. 2007).

<sup>24</sup> *Beat Street*. Dir. Stan Lathan. (New York. Orion Pictures. 1984).

<sup>25</sup> *Krushgroove*. Dir. Michael Schultz. (Warner Bros. Los Angeles. 1985).

changed, deemed artful and moving when made with sincerity, intelligence, and creativity. As a culture with pillars of tradition and American history, hip-hop has helped countless populations of people communicate grievances about social conditions. At this juncture in hip-hop's history, in American history, a course dedicated to hip-hop is valuable because it is truly interdisciplinary and allows room for all facets of approaches while practically speaking, is a topic that captures student interest. What other course can look at violence, class politics, women's issues, homophobia, race relations, music, poverty, media, and history in such a dynamic manner? Youth from all backgrounds and economic classes purchase and listen to hip-hop in addition to participating in it. Moving forward, there is no reason why hip-hop should not be explored in greater numbers across universities as its development, complications, and interest continue to evolve and thrive in future generations and globally as well.

## WEEK 1

### Daily Course Objective:

This first session will introduce the course, its main texts, familiarize students, and review the syllabus. It will also introduce hip-hop as a valuable, complex culture with a fairly recent yet textured history worthy of examination.

Specifically, students will understand the history of hip-hop, its pioneers, its important recordings, and historical benchmarks—on a macro level, issues of race, politics, gender, and violence will be eventually explored through readings and through the music itself.

Students will also identify ‘Hip-Hop’s Four Elements’ by the semester’s end and understand that hip-hop is a relatively young art form that is uniquely American, and one that is wrought with complex issues regarding race, gender, violence, class, and politics.

**Hour 1:** Hand out course syllabus and discuss its contents ensuring students understand expectations and objectives. Introduce the course and what exactly students will bring away from it. Have students take out the main course readings, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, *Hip Hop Matters*, and *And It Don’t Stop*, explaining their importance, how they are interconnected, and how they will be utilized throughout the semester.

**Hour 2:** Further introduction of the coursework will be discussed with a specific emphasis on the students and well classroom protocol. Students arrange chairs in a circular fashion to make conversing easier. The instructor explains reasons for the course’s development, the motivations, materials and importance of a class such as this. Instructor also explains his or her background, answering any questions students might

have about his or her experience or the topic itself. Have students introduce themselves, explaining their reasons for enrollment, their specific major, music they typically enjoy, and their initial impressions of hip-hop music and culture.

**Hour 3:** After introducing the readings, highlighting how they relate to one another, and after explaining course expectations and requirements, the class transitions into a listening exercise followed by discussion. This will serve as a lighthearted introduction garnering student interest. Important hip-hop recordings will be played aloud. Instructor introduces each song by underscoring various lyrics and themes heard in the recordings. The instructor will advise students to be mindful of the accompanying music, not just the lyrics. Songs that will be played are:

- ‘Personality Jock’ by King Tim III and The Fatback Band: Largely considered the first record to aesthetically resemble what rap music would become. Released in 1978 by a funk group called The Fatback Band.
- ‘Rapper’s Delight’ by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five: A single that would reach #36 on the Billboard charts, making it the first known rap charting single. Released in 1979 and was largely the public’s first introduction to hip-hop.
- ‘The Breaks’ by Kurtis Blow: A single that was rap’s first blockbuster hit, selling 1 million copies. Kurtis Blow was also the first rapper to appear on television (Soul Train) and was the first rapper signed to a major record label. This also marked the transition when hip-hop became big business.

The three songs, ranging from 3-minutes each, are early seminal hip-hop benchmarks that students will listen to in detail. Discussion will take place after each song is played.

Instructor briefly introduces each artist and their impact in hip-hop. Instructor will touch

on each song's importance while getting general feedback from students immediately after each recording is played. Questions for students to consider are:

- Did they enjoy the songs? Why or why not?
- How are they different from today's rap music—such as artists Lil' Wayne, Kanye West, or Jay-Z? What is different about the music aesthetically? What is the same?
- What are the themes discussed in each song? Did these songs perhaps reflect issues of its era? Why or why not? What are the major themes of today's rap music?

Facilitation of discussion and reiteration of each song's importance will be the focus at this juncture. Depending on the duration of said discussion, the remainder of hour 3 is reserved for introduction of the upcoming reading. It is imperative to inform students of specific themes, persons, and places involved. Since this is the first initial session, scaffolding will take place to ensure focus is on imperative or correct areas in the readings. The instructor will hand out an instructional guide with the following questions with key points for students to consider while reading. Instructor then explains each question, tell students what to look for, and answer any questions that might have arisen thus far. This procedure will only take place in the course's early stages. The questions are:

- What area of New York did hip-hop arose in?
- What were the social and economic conditions in these areas?
- Why do you think the author began the narrative with a story about Reggie Jackson?



- Who are the two major figures cited as the first major originators and purveyors of hip-hop?
- Why do you think the location of Yankee stadium is of importance?
- What are social connections between Jamaica and hip-hop? What are the musical connections? What similarities and differences are highlighted between Jamaica and New York?
- Who are some of the major Jamaican artists mentioned and why are they mentioned?
- Are there similar themes between Reggae and hip-hop?

To encourage a classroom culture of open discussion, students are to write down questions they have regarding hip-hop. Answer and facilitate discussion while connecting to themes discussed in the reading. Reiterate syllabus: students are to begin *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and read up to pg. 86.

**Debriefing:** The goal of this first session is to introduce students to important themes the course will focus on, logistics of the course itself, and ease any anxiety students might have. The actual work of this first session is shallow, mainly focusing on broader concepts, instructor/student introductions, and music listening exercises. More dynamic and involved exercises will progress gradually as the semester builds. Students will know that the course will not simply be a 'history of hip-hop' course but will entail in-depth and sometimes uncomfortable issues with vulgar language during discussion and/or exercises. In short, students will be exposed to a plethora of audio and visual aids, Socratic discussions and colloquiums regarding historical and contemporary topics throughout the semester.

## WEEK 2

### Daily Course Objective:

‘Hip-Hop’s Four Elements’ will be introduced and examined through an introductory lecture. The organization and modus operandi of the course moving forward will be: discussion of previous readings followed by lecture and activity or examination of a particular media.

This session will hold an audio demonstration of foundational techniques that progressed hip-hop during its early stages. The recordings played in this session are of great importance in hip-hop culture. The recordings are not rap songs, but rather funk, soul, and jazz recordings that are pillars of early recordings. After said demonstration, recordings will be followed by class discussion.

**Hour 1:** Lecture on ‘Hip-Hop’s Four Elements’, introducing the foundation of each.

The ‘Four Elements’ are: Rapping, DJing, Breakdancing, and Graffiti. Each was interconnected at hip-hop’s inception and are methods of participation in hip-hop culture. The lecture begins with the DJing aspect, as it is directly linked to the assigned reading regarding Clive ‘Kool Herc’ Campbell.

**1) DJing:** Also known as ‘Turntablism’, it is the first element examined.

Chronologically, it is the first hip-hop element that took place, serving as the foundation in which other elements were built upon it. Explain and reiterate these points regarding DJing:

- Explain that hip-hop’s beginning mirrored routines established in Jamaica as part of the Jamaican Sound system format, a method by which large speakers were connected to record players where musicians spoke over the music.

- Kool Herc's methods of extending the break essentially sparked hip-hop and were considered the earliest routine in DJing. Extending the break is a method in which instrumental portions of two recordings are played side by side, making it sound as one fluid recording.
- The most important recording that was first employed in this element was 'Apache', by The Incredible Bongo Band.
- Explain that the type of records played at this time were funk, soul and disco.
- Explain each component of the DJ setup used in the demonstration—demonstrate what the needle on the turntable is, what functions the mixer does and what it is for, and so basic methods of scratching.
- Some elements of DJing were also taken from the Disco scene, mainly the matching of the BPMs (beats per minute) from one song to the next.

**2) MCing:** Also known as 'Rapping' is the next element.

- Explain that the physical act of plugging in a microphone and speaking over drum patterns began in Jamaica.
- The technique was furthered when MCs began demonstrating this at social events organized by Kool Herc. These large gatherings, essentially parties, were known as 'block parties' and originally took place in the Bronx, New York.
- MC stands for 'master of ceremonies'. At the start, MCs did not necessarily rap. Comments delivered in short stanzas were introduced in order to maintain a lively atmosphere and promote crowd interaction. It is important to note that at this juncture, complete rap songs were not being made nor written.

- MCing was still in primitive stages and was more of an accompaniment than a focal point.
- Play an audio clip of ‘Personality Jock’ by King Tim III and The Fatback Band. This recording is the first recording where the MC had extended verses over the music and is speaking in what resembles modern rapping. Explain that it was one song off a funk album entitled *VII* by the Fatback Band.

**3) Breakdancing:** Also called ‘b-boying’, breakdancing began at these block parties.

- As students are familiarized with the notion of a ‘break’, explain that the term ‘breakdancing’ was developed because these dancers would step forth and dance over these ‘breaks’.
- A lot of the early breakdancing styles were quick, fast-paced movements and jerks that mimicked the fast drum rhythms they danced over.
- Acrobatic routines developed where physical strength and style became part of the protocol.
- ‘Dance crews’, a loose-knit association of dancers with costumes, routines, and a chosen group name, would often compete or ‘battle’ one another, acting out dance moves that depicted or mimicked acts of violence, fighting and shooting for example.
- The objective was to show coordination, rhythm and originality in dance form.
- Breakdancing and the rise of dance crews are credited with decreasing violence in inner city New York during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

- Breakdancing was the subject of many Hollywood films in the 1980s. These films usurped the importance of Breakdance culture and trivialized the positive effects it had in gang-plagued communities.
- This era of films is often referred to as ‘Breaksploitation Films’—*Breakin 1&2*, *Krush Groove*, *Wild Style*, *Beat Street* are famous examples.
- Historically famous dance crews such as The Rocksteady Crew and The New York City Breakers will be cited as well.
- Clips of these films can be shown periodically throughout the lecture.

**4) Graffiti:** The last element of hip-hop, and perhaps its most understated. It will be the final element discussed in this session as it directly transitions into *Wild Style*, an important film that will be shown and discussed in the following class session.

- Explain how graffiti is not a new concept nor was it invented by hip-hop culture, but that it has deep ties in regards to hip-hop’s initial growth.
- Graffiti art was an underground scene in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. These graffiti artists listened to hip-hop music and helped proliferate it during the beginning.
- Speak about Fab Five Freddy, a towering figure of graffiti art who strove to legitimize the styles and creativity that took place.
- Refer to *Overground*, a graffiti book that documents various trends in the graffiti movement. It also contains photos of some of the earliest and most influential of documented graffiti.

- Explain the various styles of graffiti and how it was adopted as a font directly tied to hip-hop culture. Images should be shown to draw distinctions between earlier, more simple graffiti and later, more complex forms.

**Hour 2:** Have students take out *Can't Stop Won't Stop* for discussion. Take questions students might have about previous readings. Each session will begin with a recap and discussion of said readings. While key points will be reiterated during the first sessions, this will gradually dissipate as the semester progresses. Students will be solely responsible for addressing critical points through discussions and written assignments. At this juncture, reiterate the following key points about said readings from pages 1-86 of Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop*:

- Hip-hop arose in Bronx, New York in the early 1970s.
- New York had budgetary issues, police conflicts, and a high gang problem at the time.
- The beginning of *Can't Stop Won't Stop* depicted racial tensions occurring in New York City at the time.
- The story about Reggie Jackson was meant to show two sides of New York: The celebrated and glamorous side of East Coast living, as well as the underbelly of poverty and crime that dually coexisted.
- Clive 'Kool Herc' Campbell is largely responsible for the beginning of hip-hop when he synched two-turntables and extended 'the break' of a song.
- The economic and social conditions in Jamaica are almost identical to inner city Bronx New York—poverty, gangs, drugs, stagnate upward mobility.

Take a moment to clarify all materials listed above. Reiterate that hip-hop and its early techniques developed through parties Clive ‘Kool Herc’ Campbell hosted, as he is an important figure whom is referenced throughout the semester.

**Hour 3:** The final hour is an audio-visual demonstration, focusing on Clive ‘Kool Herc’ Campbell’s techniques. The following will be part demonstration, part question and answer. Show a 20-minute film clip from the film *Brasilintime*, playing excerpts depicting DJs using two-turntables, an audio mixer, and two copies of the ‘Apache’ record to ‘extend the break’. Reiterate that the specific technique seen is precisely that in which Kool Herc did at his block parties. Following the film excerpt, recordings will be played aloud. They are:

**-The Incredible Bongo Band: ‘Apache’** – The first record used by Kool Herc in his famous turntable routines. While it was a novelty funk song, the instrumental version released in 1973, is considered a ‘Hip-Hop Anthem’ and one that is largely recognized as a prevailing theme song for breakdancers.

**-Bob James: ‘Take Me To Mardi Gras’** - The beginning of this jazz song, released in 1974, has been sampled repeatedly since hip-hop’s early days. It is an instrumental cover version of a song by folk singer-songwriter, Paul Simon.

**-Melvin Bliss: ‘Synthetic Substitution’** – This record is the b-side to a jazz-funk record released in 1973. The beginning and middle portions of the song have been interpolated into rap songs since the beginning of hip-hop.

Collectively, these three songs are among the most famously sampled recordings in hip-hop music. The demonstration will take the remainder of the second hour and perhaps continue into the next session.

**Debriefing:** This second session essentially sets the format of the course. Students will be familiar with hip-hop's four elements and understand the importance of each. They will have also heard important clips of hip-hop recording while examining the important dynamics of each. This section essentially scaffolds the student towards the next session, which will be an examination of one of hip-hop's most important films, *Style Wars*. Students are to read pages 89-109 in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and the chapter entitled 'Africa Bambaataa's Hip-Hop' from Cepeda's *And It Don't Stop*. Both assigned readings directly complement information found in each respective chapters. The readings will reinforce today's session and prepare students for the next session, a focus on graffiti.



## WEEK 3

### Daily Course Objective:

The graffiti aspect of hip-hop's 'Four Elements' will be introduced through a short opening lecture, explaining what students must be aware of when watching today's film.

Students will watch *Style Wars*, a revered documentary film covering the graffiti movement and the rise of hip-hop culture in New York in the early 1980s. *Style Wars* directly connects images, sounds, people, and specific incidents discussed thus far. Students will see firsthand images of the people, places, and sounds from last week's readings and from when hip-hop began. Discussion and a brief reflective in-class writing will take place immediately following film.

**Hour 1:** Recap the previous assigned readings and facilitate brief discussion. Questions to ask students are below:

- Who were The Black Spades?
- Who are considered the '3 Kings Of Hip-Hop' and why?
- What was the Universal Zulu Nation? What was its role in hip-hop's early days?
- Who is Afrika Bambaataa and why was he so important regarding hip-hop's rise?
- How did graffiti directly play a role in Afrika Bambaataa's reputation?
- Who were the two parties involved in the violence that escalated in the Bronx during this time?
- What specifically did Bambaataa do to effect gang warfare?
- Who is Afeni Shakur? Who was her eventual son and what is he most known for?
- What is the connection between Jamaica and Clive 'Kool Herc' Campbell?

Introduce the film. Students will see the racial makeup of the participants, the aesthetics of graffiti and hear the early attitudes towards hip-hop from participants as well as city officials of the time. Students will be encouraged to be mindful of readings while watching the film, connecting images with information read and discussed thus far. Students will see the ‘dance battles’ discussed in earlier sessions. They will also hear various examples of early rap recordings that were popular at the time. Following the film, there will be a debriefing as well as an in-class writing assignment.

**Hour 2:** Play film and have students take notes. Said notes can be used for our writing assignment and will be turned in for participation credit.

**Hour 3:** Following the film, arrange desks into a circular fashion, asking students for their reactions. Each student will be asked to speak and participate. There will be roughly 30-35 minutes for this final exercise.

- What did you see that struck you?
- How did this film about graffiti actually depict hip-hop in its infancy?
- What are the obvious differences between hip-hop then and hip-hop now?
- What are the aesthetic differences? What are the philosophical differences?
- What were the attitudes towards hip-hop then? Have they changed? How and why?
- What are your personal thoughts on Graffiti? Is it vandalism or art? Or both?

After brief discussion, students will engage in an in-class writing assignment in which they respond to the following questions below. Some of the questions do not have a definitive

correct or incorrect answer—it is the students’ justifications and explanations that are most important. This is to be collected at the end of class for both participation points, graded, and passed back at the beginning of the next session. A handout with the following short answer questions are:

- Do you think these graffiti artists were part of New York’s problems or a product of them? Why?
- Were the young people in the film aware that they were part of a growing movement? Or was it simply what they were accustomed to? What did they do or say specifically that made you think so?
- How were each of the four elements depicted in the movie? In what ways were these depictions different than today’s hip-hop? How were they the same?
- How was the urban landscape physically transformed by hip-hop music? What do you think the youth depicted in the movie were trying to portray through graffiti? Were they justified in doing so?

**Debriefing:** This third session is meant to connect readings and discussions while presenting students with an important film on the subject matter. *Style Wars* is considered one of the most essential documentations of hip-hop’s early years. It is imperative for students to watch and understand. The four elements discussed thus far are on full display in the film, which sets a precedent for the course to move forward. Graffiti preceded all major elements of hip-hop thus it is the first element to be examined. At this juncture, students will have read about all of hip-hop’s early rise, primary pioneers, its affect on New York City, and other early sights and sounds. Students will read pages 109-167 from the *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*. The in-class writing assignment

will be passed back in the next session, as we examine the graffiti element further through short readings. Students are to bring Cepeda's *And It Don't Stop* to the next session.

## WEEK 4

### Daily Course Objective:

This session will complete the unit on graffiti and move into the next element, breakdancing. The chronological connections between the two elements will make transitions both easy and logical. Students will understand the importance of graffiti within hip-hop, seeing how and why it is used on rap albums, show flyers, movie posters and other ephemera.

**Hour 1:** Consistent with every class session, we will go over the previous readings.

Questions to be discussed include:

- What is the connection between graffiti and breakdancing?
- What was 'The Ghost Yard'?
- Who was Grandmaster Flash? How did he proliferate notions and philosophies started by Afrika Bambaataa and Kool Herc?
- Why is breakdancing called 'physical graffiti'?
- What did a lot of graffiti monikers entail? What were the numbers supposed to signify?
- Who is TAKI 183 and what legitimized him and graffiti?
- How was New York's graffiti movement covered in the early days? Did this help popularize it or hurt its growth?
- What was the first major rap record? What did locals in the Bronx think of 'Rappers Delight'?
- With the popularity of 'Rappers Delight'; what did it do to change public opinion about graffiti?

- How were graffiti artists racially profiled by national media at the time? How accurate were these descriptions?

**Hour 2:** Return the in-class writing assignments and facilitate discussion based on student's answers and opinions. Make sure to reiterate the 'Four Movements To One Culture (pg. 148-162)' section of *Can't Stop Won't Stop*. Ensure students understand the tenets of graffiti, how and why it started, and its significance in hip-hop history. The rest of this hour will be used to answer questions and clarify our unit on graffiti, leading into some visual components of the art form.

**Hour 3:** Conclude the unit on graffiti by lecturing while showing slides of popular graffiti. Reiterate the following points below.

- Graffiti was initially a method of showing angst experienced by racial profiling and lack of resources. It wasn't meant to be vandalism but rather 'street art'.
- It was also an artistic medium that included most breakdancers.
- The notion of 'style' is the focal point of graffiti, to represent one's neighborhood in creative ways while building upon previous styles.
- The shift in graffiti styles progressed exponentially in the early 1980s. Graffiti was initially praised as art and further legitimized by publications like The New York Times and New York Magazine.
- It was also the first dynamic of hip-hop that was demonized as the culture became more popular, coinciding with the success of Grandmaster Flash's 'Rapper Delight'.
- Upper-class socialites and European art collectors were buying anything that resembled graffiti. Once the graffiti boom subsided in New York, other regions,

mainly the Western United States, Europe and Japan, reported a rise in graffiti in their urban sectors.

**Debriefing:** After watching *Style Wars* and reading the “The Writing On The Wall: Graffiti Culture Crumbles Into The Violence It Once Escaped” from *And It Don’t Stop*, students will be familiar with its history and various issues within it. Students will understand how graffiti was used within hip-hop culture and what the participants’ intentions were. This unit on graffiti includes audio and visual components that will aid classroom instruction and help guide students who learn differently. Also, at this stage, students are well acquainted with hip-hop’s three main pioneers, Clive “Kool Herc” Campbell, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash and how they rose out of urban poverty into mainstream culture. We will end our unit on graffiti. Chronologically speaking, the first rap record was released to a surprisingly receptive audience who made it a charting single on the Billboard charts. Graffiti was used to demonize hip-hop, while it influenced the art world and sparked other graffiti movements worldwide. The next section will focus on breakdancing. It will transition rather easily as we have already touched briefly on it in other readings. Students are to read pages 167-231 from the *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and bring *And It Don’t Stop* to class for the next section.

Homework will include reading *And It Don’t Stop*, specifically the chapter “The Writing On The Wall: Graffiti Culture Crumbles Into The Violence It Once Escaped” (Pgs. 185-200). Students will produce a quick reflective writing to be turned in during the next session. Students are to write a visceral response to the essay they just read in *And It Don’t Stop*, explaining whether they think graffiti is art or not. Most importantly, they are to explain their opinion, including but not restricted to their thoughts on the art, the

people involved, and the racial overtones that plagued it. This is to be turned in at the start of the next session.



## WEEK 5

### Daily Course Objective:

Begin unit on breakdancing also known as ‘b-boying’ or ‘b-girling’. After examining graffiti and studying hip-hop’s early history, breakdancing logical follows as the next element of examination. Students will understand stark connections between breakdancing and graffiti.

Students will also examine the ‘breaksploitation’ era of the 1980s, a time where hip-hop’s explosion was usurped in movies and marketing campaigns, garnering money while the images reinforced negative stereotypes of those involved. Said images from films and clips will be shown.

The students will begin another seminal film, *Planet B-Boy*. The contemporary film documents breakdancing’s rise, showing its global popularity through an international breakdancing competition. This session will cover early phases of breakdancing, its methods, its intentions, and how it relates to hip-hop as one of the four elements.

**Hour 1:** Recap readings from last session. Questions for consideration are below.

- What are the immediate connections between graffiti and breakdancing that you have learned?
- What songs were considered ‘breakdancing anthems’ and why were they adopted as such? What about the music made it useful?

- What was the America's economic situation during the time breakdancing was becoming popular?
- Who was Fab 5 Freddy and what were his efforts in promoting both breakdancing and graffiti?
- Who were the Rock Steady Crew and what did they do that others in their field had not done before?
- What was the international reaction to breakdancing?
- Who is Deborah Harry? What were her connections to early hip-hop? What did she do that helped popularize hip-hop to even more mainstream levels?
- How was Afrika Bambaataa's work utilized once breakdancing grew in popularity?
- What specific films glamorized the breakdance movement? How were the images of those involved portrayed? Was this helpful or hurtful to the growing mainstream conceptions of hip-hop?

**Hours 2 and 3:** After the discussion, introduce the film, *Planet B-Boy*. Students will see footage of breakdancing from the era we have discussed as well as modern images of its progression. This will take the entire class session.

**Debriefing:** The film concludes the remainder of this session. At this juncture, students will know the historical development of breakdancing, its relation to hip-hop culture and the role it plays as one of the four elements. *Can't Stop Won't Stop* will get a reprieve this week and will continue after the following session. Students will read these chapters from *And It Don't Stop*: 'Physical Graffiti: Breaking is Hard To Do' and 'London Rocks, Paris Burns, And The B-Boys Break A Leg'.

The first chapter is a Village Voice article written about the art of breakdancing. Students will examine press given to breakdancing by local media outlets and discuss its depiction of breakdancing. The second article is an account of a famous breakdancing competition in London. It will benefit students to see breakdancing's global impact during the mid-1980s. Readings from *And It Don't Stop* will allow for further, more in-depth examinations, unlike *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, which has a more historical approach in regards to breakdancing.

## WEEK 6

### Daily Course Objective:

The film *Planet B-Boy* will be concluded. Instructor answers questions and clarifies any information students may have in regards to breakdancing before transitioning to the next unit, 'Rapping', also referred to as 'MCing'. Students will be familiar with breakdancing's progression, the time in which it became popular, its main pioneers, its connection to graffiti culture, and what the physical aesthetics looks like.

Students will understand certain meanings and intentions behind specific dance moves, routines, patterns, and mannerisms. Students will examine various issues related to its rise towards the mainstream.

We will discuss readings from *And It Don't Stop*. Students will respond to the breakdancing unit with two in-class writing assignments that are to be completed for instructor to assess understanding.

**Hour 1:** Recap and discuss the film, making sure students have a firm grasp on the role of breakdancing in hip-hop, especially how it was used and marketed in the early phases of its popularity. Students will understand specific people, specific music, and specific reasons as to how breakdancing developed in the first place. The class will write and complete a reflective response of the film, providing answers to the following questions. Said questions are more open-ended, encouraging students to justify and show reasoning through readings and films seen in previous sessions. Instructor will hand out a form with the following questions that are to be answered:

- Why is breakdancing sometimes referred to as ‘Physical Graffiti’? Besides the obvious differences; what are the similarities? What connects the two?
- What was Fab 5 Freddy’s involvement in breakdancing? How did he connect this to graffiti and what did he do to proliferate both elements? Did he succeed?
- How was the article, ‘Physical Graffiti: Breaking Is Hard To Do’, comparable to other media that was covering breakdancing at this time?
- Why is ‘style’ so revered in breakdancing? Do you see a trend in hip-hop in regards to the notion of ‘style’?
- Why do some people do not like the term ‘breakdancing’? Why is it referred to as ‘breakdancing’?
- The routines and segments in breakdancing are often real brief. Why is this and what is the purpose in having such brief routines?
- How were breakdancing styles in London different than those in New York City? Who were the New York City Breakers and Rock Steady Crew?
- How was Afrika Bambaataa’s work an integral part of breakdancing without him physically taking part in it?

**Hours 2 and 3:** The class will now watch scenes from three films that proliferated, glorified, demonized and helped define this era of ‘breaksploitation’. These films are:

-*Wild Style*

-*Breakin’*

-*Krush Groove.*

Each film have climactic scenes that depict informal breakdancing competitions, also called ‘battles’, which are amongst the most famous breakdancing sequences ever recorded. Not only are the routines dynamic and entertaining, but they also serve as documentation of the era. These film clips—each about 15-minutes—will take approximately 45 minutes to view. This viewing is to ingrain imagery, music, and notable figures discussed in this unit thus far. It is important for students to actually view and hear what has been covered in assigned readings.

Following the film clips, students will have 1 hour to write an in-class, informal essay on their understanding of breakdancing. This writing assignment works for both in-class credit as well as a measurement of students’ understanding of the material. The essay will be reflective, including personal understandings, likes, dislikes, and directly answer these questions, while using examples from *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and *And It Don’t Stop*, and *Planet B-Boy*. The questions will be handed out and students will address the following:

- Do you think the explosion of breakdancing helped or hurt hip-hop’s image during this new phase of popularity? Was the reaction to breakdancing different in the US as compared to internationally?
- Was breakdancing exploited in any way? How? Why or why not?
- How were the media images during this ‘breaksploitation’ era correct? How were they incorrect? Explain your answers in detail.
- How is breakdancing a vital component of hip-hop’s four elements? What are the tangible connections and similarities between breakdancing and graffiti?

- What are your personal thoughts on breakdancing as an art form?

Briefly lecture once students have completed essay, tying together past units on graffiti and breakdancing while introducing the DJ element of hip-hop. Some key points to consider during lecture are as follows:

- Afrika Bambaataa's presence was still felt, especially after the song 'Planet Rock' changed the soundtrack to what breakdancers danced to. Moreover, it was one of the first European songs embraced by hip-hop, counter the usual funk, soul or disco that had been normally used.
- Breakdancing was the main element that broke hip-hop into the mainstream—more so than rapping, DJing, or graffiti.
- The 'breaksploitation' era both helped and hurt hip-hop's image.
- Purists consider the term 'breakdancers' to be a commercialized nomenclature. The preferred term that originated from the Bronx is 'B-Boys and/or B-Girls'.
- Fab 5 Freddy was an early pioneer who was depicted in the film *Wildstyle*. He was an early embodiment of what hip-hop was because he was a proponent of graffiti as art, because he rapped, and because he also helped bring breakdancing to the world through an array of media interviews. Fab 5 Freddy was essentially an early spokesman for hip-hop.
- Breakdancers from New York had much more advanced, detailed styles and movements compared to international breakdancers.

- International breakdancers were thematically behind since they built upon images seen in ‘breaksploitation’ films—most of which were years old by the time it was introduced to an international audience.
- The current best breakdancers in the world are—as of the writing of this—are from South Korea.
- Breakdancing is sometimes called ‘Physical Graffiti’ because of the emphasis on style, more specifically, deriving new movements from preceding styles.

**Debriefing:** We will close out our unit on breakdancing today. At this juncture, students will have seen all celebrated breakdancing images from paramount films we watched. They will also be familiar with what breakdancing did for hip-hop culture and its impact on popular culture as well. They will also know specific pioneers and figures that made the movement what it was and currently what it is. *Planet B-Boy* brings the examination of breakdancing to its totality, showing its advancement as an international art form in its current state. Students will understand where breakdancing developed within hip-hop’s timeline and its relation to the four elements. Students will have also written their thoughts on the matter in a reflective essay that combined personal response with the readings and films we have examined. The next session is the midterm examination. As such, there will be no reading (though students will be advised to reassess and re-read all the previous readings).



## WEEK 7

### **Daily Course Objective:**

Students will re-examine specific course readings in preparation for the midterm examination. The first half hour will be a review session (which can be extended depending on student need). The final 2.5 hours of the course will be dedicated to the exam.

**Hour 1:** This week represents the mid-way point of the semester. The first half of this hour will be for clarification needs. Instructor will write the following terms on the board as a starting point for students. The terms, which are culled from readings, films, and audio heard thus far, will guide students through the exam. If they are familiar and well versed regarding the people, places, events, and certain terminology, success will be likely. The following terms written on the board are:

- Kool Herc
- Africa Bambaataa
- Grandmaster Flash
- 'Apache'
- The Black Spades
- Wild Style
- Rock Steady Crew
- New York City Breakers
- Sampling

- Breaks
- Bronx, New York
- Kingston, Jamaica
- Jamaican Soundsystem
- Four Elements
- 'Planet Rock'
- Fab 5 Freddy
- Breaksploitation

The instructor will review each term, citing their relevance and historical importance. Students will also have silent time to recap independently. A combination of both independent study along with instructor aid is preferred.

**Hour 2 and 3:** Students will have 2.5 hours to complete 10 short-answer questions. Each question contains multiple questions. Students are to address the entire question correctly for full credit—otherwise, partial credit will be given accordingly. The questions closely follow readings and contain portions that require opinion, which are to be justified through examples from films, readings and/or discussion or all three. Students can leave once examination is finished. The following 10 questions will be displayed on an overhead projector. The midterm examination questions are:

- 1) What were the social and economic conditions in Bronx, New York like in the early to mid 1970s? What were the predominant mentalities from those living in the area? How did it differ from those living outside of the area? Be specific.

- 2) What are the major connections between what occurred in the Bronx in the early 1970s compared to Jamaica in the late 1960s? Why do you think elements from the Jamaican Soundsystem worked well in America? What were the fundamental differences between the two?
- 3) Who is Clive 'Kool' Herc Campbell and what was his significance? What exactly did he do that was revolutionary? Describe his exact techniques which many claim started hip-hop.
- 4) Who are the other two pioneers normally mentioned along with Kool Herc and why are they also considered the 'Forefathers of Hip-Hop'? What are their backgrounds and what did each do that garnered such reverence? How are the actions of these individuals interconnected? How are they not so connected? Be specific.
- 5) Describe the element of graffiti in its fullest terms. How did it begin? How was it used? Who were the major players? How did it help hip-hop? How did it hurt hip-hop? What were the major issues associated with graffiti?
- 6) Describe the element of breakdancing in fullest terms. How did it begin? What is the connection to graffiti? Who were the major players? What do you think caused the major decline in breakdancing in the late 1980s? How has breakdancing become the most globalized, most ethnically diverse aspect of hip-hop?
- 7) What does the term 'breaksploitation' refer to? What are some of the major examples that came from this era? How was it a proper representation? How was

it accurate? How was it an inaccurate description? How did it help hip-hop?  
How did it hurt hip-hop?

- 8) What were the titles of the earliest rap records? What was the subject matter normally about? What did the music aesthetically resemble? What was the reason for this? How do you think the sound and subjects differ from today's hip-hop?
- 9) What is the significance of the 'Apache' record? By what other name is it known? Connect the song, how it was used, and what it did for hip-hop. Be very specific as to who used it, why it was used, how it was used, and what the historical significance of the record is.
- 10) Now that you have been familiarized with hip-hop's early developments; what do you think are the major hurdles hip-hop will face as it reached the 1990s? Make predictions based on our readings and based on your general knowledge of pop culture. Do you think this is the correct vision that hip-hop pioneers would have envisioned for the art form? Why or why not. Be specific and justify your answers.

**Debriefing:** Students will complete the midterm examination in class. Each short answer question should essentially be 2 to 3 paragraphs in length, is worth 10 points each, totaling 100 points. Partial credit can be given. Students are to read pages 231-299 from *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and prepare to discuss its contents for next session. Our next unit will closely follow the book and focus heavily on the rapping elements of hip-hop. We will listen to many audio samples, examining at the history of rapping, and seeing

how the progression of styles, content, and trends have developed through the decades.

The course is now at the midway point as we approach the end of *Can't Stop Won't Stop*.

## WEEK 8

### Daily Course Objective:

This unit represents the most visible, most derided, and perhaps the most celebrated hip-hop element—rapping, also referred to as ‘MCing’. Readings from *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* will be accessed, specifically focusing on Chuck D and Public Enemy, and the controversy that surrounded rap lyrics at the start of the 1990s. In-depth discussion of readings will commence prior to an important listening exercise. Audio of the most influential, historically important, and criticized rap songs will be played aloud in class. Students will be informed about the recordings, the artists behind them, and the various themes of the music itself.

A review of the midterm examination will take place to ensure students are cognizant of the materials and themes examined thus far.

**Hour 1:** Lecture briefly about rapping and its relation to the ‘four elements’. Below are key points to relay during lecture:

- Rapping first began in conjunction with DJing.
- The first rappers were called MCs, meaning ‘Master Of Ceremonies’. They did not ‘rap’ over the music, but was more a vocal entity that supplemented the music.
- Early MCs spoke short sayings to engage the crowd. Some of these documented sayings were: ‘Party people in the house’ or ‘Throw your hands in the air, wave them like you just don’t care’. Entire stanzas of lyrics were not yet delivered.
- MCs were not the focal point of the party; they were just part of the dynamic.

- Eventually, MCs started delivering longer stanzas of speech.
- The first official recording of music that most closely resembled rapping, and is widely considered the first recorded rap song, is ‘Personality Jock’ by King Tim III and the Fatback Band. It was a funk record that featured a single song which contained full stanzas of lyrics.
- Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five’s ‘The Message’ was the first charting rap song. The single went platinum in two months.

**Hour 2:** In line with readings from *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and the previous lecture, the class will listen to some of the artists and songs mentioned. They will hear recordings that preceded and followed those discussed in our readings. This exercise will counteract any possible monotony from constant discussion and film clips.

Students will take out a piece of paper, writing down their reactions to each audio clip played. The following 2 points are to be addressed for each recording:

- 1) Do you like the song? Why or why not?
- 2) How does each differ from the next? What are the main differences you hear?

The music will be played in chronological order of when they were released. The in-class writing assignment will be collected for participation credit. This juncture of the course will perfectly highlight readings from *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*. This exercise will carry over into the next session. The instructor will introduce each song, its significance, and what students should be aware of while listening. The songs range from 3 minutes to 6 minutes each. Below are songs we will hear and examine, followed by what students will listen for:

- **‘Personality Jock’ by King Tim III and The Fatback Band:** Considered the first rap recording ever. It is a funk song. The rap cadence is very simple and focuses ‘bragging’ and ‘partying’. Students will be familiar with this since it was also the first audio played in the course 8 weeks ago.
- **‘The Message’ by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five:** The first solo rap record to go platinum. Heralded by the NY Times as ‘one of the most important songs of the year’. The subject matter was about inner-city life and how it affects one’s mind.
- **‘Rapture’ by Blondie:** A song from the film *Wildstyle*. It featured rock star Blondie rapping a couple stanzas. It was a novelty recording that displayed the crossover potential of rap music.
- **‘Walk This Way’ by Run DMC (featuring Aerosmith):** Cemented Def Jam Records as the most powerful, influential Rap record label in the world. Blending rap with rock, it cemented rap’s mainstream popularity. Stylistically, the rapping was slower but more aggressive.
- **‘Children’s Story’ by Slick Rick:** It was one of the first detailed rap songs that was told completely through a third person narrative. It was a full story and would become a classic song that is referenced up to this day.
- **‘Fight The Power’ by Public Enemy:** It was a militant rap song that was controversial for its violent, pro-Black lyrics. The lyrics by Chuck D were loud and almost lecture-like. It was bar far the most rambunctious, aggressive rap song ever recorded at the time.



- **‘Follow The Leader’ by Eric B & Rakim:** This changed the way rappers delivered their lyrics. Rakim is considered ‘Rap’s Coltrane’ for his metaphors and double-entendres. His style and voice was also more reserved than rappers before him, emphasizing the words and rhyme structure.

**Hour 3:** Instructor hands back previous midterm examination, going over portions of the examination where students’ are unclear. This is imperative before delving into more material. Instructor will read aloud specific questions where a majority of students missed (this will take a few minutes and will be adapted to the first hour accordingly). Recap the previous readings, linking it to the progression of what we have examined thus far. While graffiti and breakdancing were the first elements to achieve national and international exposure, the rapping aspect—more specifically, the lyrical content—is what garnered attention during the late 1980s, continuing well into the 1990s. Below are questions from the readings to consider:

- Where were figures such as Chuck D, Russell Simmons and Run DMC from? How was their music aesthetically different?
- What did these figures represent to New York hip-hop artists?
- What was the ‘Black Belt’? How did it help establish Long Island?
- How was the growing Black suburbs affecting rap music?
- The chapter focuses on Chuck D very frequently. Why do you think that is so?
- What were the aesthetic changes that were occurring to rap music? How was the style changing?

- What about Public Enemy's style that was so progressive? What about Chuck D's content made him both a target and an idol? What about Public Enemy's message made them so controversial?
- How was Chuck D's upbringing similar to Africa Bambaataa's childhood?
- Who was Rick Rubin and what was his importance on various aspects of Def Jam during this time? How did he affect rap music? Do you think it was for the better or worse?
- Who coined the term 'Hip-Hop Activism' and what did it mean? Who did it represent?
- Who was Rakim? What about his style set a new precedent for rap lyrics and rapping? Why was he called 'Rap's Coltrane'?

**Debriefing:** Students will make connections between rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti. They will also understand the progression of the MC, what the role originally entailed, and how it eventually evolved into full songs. Audio played will show the progression of not only rap music, but rap styles as well. Students are to read 299-357 in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and bring Cepeda's *And It Won't Stop* to the next session. We will continue listening to important audio recordings, examining the controversy surrounding certain songs. Chronologically, the course is moving out of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

## WEEK 9

### Daily Course Objective:

Recap the readings to make sure the class is in line with the material. The ‘rapping’ or ‘MCing’ element will undergo further examination. Further explore *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and focus on the 1990s, the various trends, issues, and its overall impact. Selected readings from *And It Don’t Stop* will be read this week. A continuation of listening exercises similar to last week’s session will also be conducted. Further important benchmark recordings will be played in the chronological order it was released in the 1990s. Conclude the ‘rapping element’ by session’s end.

**Hour 1:** Recap the readings through discussion and short lecture. The following are questions to consider about the reading:

- What were the conditions in South Central Los Angeles in the late 1980s and early 1990s? How were these conditions similar to Bronx, New York in the 1970s? How were they different?
- What was the ‘Radio’? What happened there?
- How were West Coast dance styles different than b-boy styles from New York?
- Who were the major purveyors of the West Coast style? Who was Erich Wright?
- What was the major West Coast trend that changed the rapping trend from storytelling to gangster? What happened to the members of the group? How did they go on to being notable figures in hip-hop?

- What were ‘Black Gangster’ movies depicting during this time? How were these movies different to the hip-hop related films of the past?
- How did street gangs influence the music that was being made in the area? What else did gang culture influence?
- What were the social and political conditions that were occurring in California during the time?
- How did the New York area react to the West Coast music that was being popularized?
- What was the backlash to NWA? Was it justified more or less than the backlash against earlier hip-hop?
- How were the depictions of crime different than East Coast rap songs that also had violent imagery?
- Who was Ice Cube? What did he do on his debut album that was connected to Public Enemy?
- How did this solve tensions between the East Coast and the West Coast? How was Ice Cube such a media target in the 1990s? Why was he more of a target than the other members of NWA?

After recapping the readings, transition towards this week’s listening exercise. Similar to last session, students are to take out a sheet of paper and write down the following items for each song:

- 1) Their reaction to the song and what they think of it.

- 2) How does each recording differ from the previous song played.

The music will be played in chronological order of when they were released. This in-class writing assignment will be collected for participation credit.

**Hour 2:** Selected songs that show the evolution of rapping styles, forms, and content will be heard. These songs range from 3-6 minutes. The song and brief synopsis are below.

- **‘Ill Communication’ by The Beastie Boys:** The first non-black rap group signed to Def Jam, a record label that would soon release some of the most important rap records in history. This will introduce students to the first white hip-hop group and how their aesthetics differ and parallel other rap released at the time.
- **‘Straight Outta Compton’ by NWA.** A very controversial song written by controversial rap group known for antagonizing lyrics that seemed to promote violence.
- **‘Lyte As A Rock’ by MC Lyte:** The first major rap record that sold worldwide written and recorded by a female. Though there were female rappers before her, Lyte was the first to really popularize the notion of the female MC.
- **‘Strictly Business’ by EPMD:** A heavy funk album filled with funk and soul samples over lyrics focused on partying and being successful. It was the first rap album to have this particular sound.
- **‘Traveling At The Speed Of Thought’ by The Ultramagnetic MCs:** The first rap album to reference space and futuristic lyrics. It was perhaps Rap’s first eccentric rap album.

- **‘What’s More?’ by De La Soul:** Produced by Prince Paul, the lyrics and overall sound focused on rapping under different cadences while have many double meanings and social commentary. It set a new trend from rap and was a stark contrast to the West Coast rap music released at the time.
- **‘Check The Rhyme’ by A Tribe Called Quest:** This song and the album it comes from, cemented the Afrocentric rap trend that many successful New York groups participated in throughout the early 1990s.
- **‘AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted’ by Ice Cube:** Continued and largely popularized sense of alienation and rage that NWA began in the late 1980s.
- **‘Nothin But A G Thang’ by Dr. Dre:** Another former member of NWA, this song and album introduced the sampling of late 1970s funk and largely glamorized the LA gang life. This song and album solidified the mainstream rise of gangsta rap once again.
- **‘Scapegoat’ by Atmosphere:** This song largely reflects the changing image of hip-hop in the late 1990s that crept into the early 2000s as well. It represents hip-hop that were not from the regional norms—in this case, Minnesota—and a burgeoning motto for homemade style rap. The content and overall sound is darker and much less focused violence.

**Hour 3:** After all audio is played, a discussion will be held to clarify and supplement information heard in the recording. Students will be aware of the content and evolution of cadence and rhyme patterns, understanding the notion of ‘style’ in hip-hop culture.

The majority of the music represents early rap recordings from the 1980s to the mid-1990s except 'Scapegoat', made in the late 1990a.

**Debriefing:** This session will expose students to important recordings in rap music.

Having heard the audio chronologically, students will understand the progression of the art form and how styles were built upon one another during this era. The music heard also directly correlates with readings from *Can't Stop Won't Stop* as well as *And It Don't Stop*, highlighting certain trends in content, movements, and specific artists. Students will read pages 357-437 from *Can't Stop Won't Stop* which focuses on the mid-1990s era of hip-hop. Having concluded the rap element of hip-hop, students will see the progression of styles and content through the decades that followed the first rap recording, 'Personality Jock'. For homework, students are to read selected chapters from *And It Don't Stop*. The chapters are as follows: 'Rappin' With Russell: Eddie Murphying The Flak-Catchers', 'The House That Rap Built', 'Foxy Brown Is The Illest' and 'The Show, The After Party, The Hotel'. Students are to read all thee chapters. Next week will focus on perhaps the most fundamental element of hip-hop culture, DJing.

## WEEK 10

### Daily Course Objective:

Begin our examination of hip-hop's 'DJ' or 'Turntablism' element. Having heard and seen the other 3 elements, this will easily follow, as DJing is the foundational component of the culture. Students will watch selected portions from *Scratch*, a documentary tracing historical developments of DJing, its importance and basic techniques. Students will also see and hear the range of sounds that can be achieved through two turntables and a mixer, both pieces of audio equipment used by DJs.

**Hour 1:** Have students take out *Can't Stop Won't Stop* for discussion. Below are discussion questions and lecture topics for consideration.

- What were some of the historical incidents that *Can't Stop Won't Stop* discussed? Why do you think they were important? What affect did they have? What event(s) do you think had the most impact on hip-hop from those readings? Do you agree or disagree?
- What is the main connection between hip-hop and the Nation Of Islam?
- Why do you think this chapter focused so extensively on LA? What about the events that happened there were connected to hip-hop? How was it not?
- How did bans of cruising and the addition to curfews added to the state of conflict in LA? What else throughout the country was adding to this 'state of fear'?
- How did the Clinton administration react as hip-hop turned from gangster rap to afro-centric rap, to more violent and sex-infused again in the early-late 1990s?



- Who were some of the rap artists that the media and government focused on during this time? Do you think it was justified? Who was and who was not? How did this attention affect the decisions of major music labels?
- What was happening to hip-hop outside of New York during this time? How was it different compared to what was happening inside New York?
- What was The Source? Why was the timing of its inception particularly important? Did it succeed?
- How did hip-hop stop being music and culture and started becoming a ‘lifestyle’? What was happening to the media’s business models at the time? What started happening as a result?
- How did the West Coast re-emerge once again? Was this good or bad for hip-hop? How did Russell Simmons reappear? What was starting to happen between West Coast and East Coast rap artists? Do you think this help or hurt the business aspect of rap?

Following discussion, focus will shift towards the final element of hip-hop—and its foundational pillar—DJing. At this juncture, students are familiar with early DJ pioneers, where it originated from, and some basic turntablism techniques and routines. They will know that everything evolved from the DJ. A short lecture to introduce the upcoming unit will recap the following:

- The notion of the DJ started with Jamaican DJs and a setup they called ‘The Jamaican Soundsystem’.

- Hip-Hop pioneers Clive ‘Kool Herc’ Campbell, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash were all DJs before achieving recognition for other work.
- Breakdancing and rapping followed the rise of DJing.
- The block parties that largely proliferated hip-hop began mostly with DJs.
- Techniques such as ‘scratching’ and ‘cutting’ were not really utilized until the mid-to-late 1980s.
- The basic setup for a DJ is 2 turntables and a mixer; the mixer allows for 2 records to be played simultaneously (or rather, specific parts to be played simultaneously).

**Hour 2 and 3:** Students will watch a documentary on the progression of the DJ. The film, *Scratch*, covers an array of history already studied while displaying some of the music, figures, and techniques studied thus far in the class. The film is approximately 115 minutes, allowing time to debrief at its conclusion. *Scratch* is considered to be the definitive film regarding DJ culture, thus students will greatly benefit from watching all of the detailed coverage. The film features rare, in-depth interviews with many of the figures already discussed in class. It also introduces many of today's pioneering DJs, their routines, techniques, and looks forward as to where the art form will progress from this juncture moving forward.

**Debriefing:** At this stage in the course, we have discussed all four elements of hip-hop, familiarizing students with each dynamic, its pioneers, how they are interconnected, and historic events that aided its progression. Our focus on the DJ was slightly shorter in comparison to the other elements, but its relevance and importance has been greatly

discussed by virtue of other units regarding rapping and breakdancing. The course is in its final stages at this juncture. Students will now have a basis for discussion for our final, probably most crucial section of the course: a look at the controversy and problematic issues within hip-hop culture.

Discussion will be the focal point of these remaining sessions. Students will finish *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and will write a short 5-page book review, citing examples, figures, and all readings and media examined thus far. A synopsis of the book as well as an examination of its most important sections will be included. The assignment is a book review, not a book report. Students will bring *Can't Stop Won't Stop* to class next week and be prepared to share and discuss. We will examine issues that hip-hop is wrought with while preparing for our final examination during the next session.

## WEEK 11

### Daily Course Objective:

With students now familiar with hip-hop's four elements and history, we will grapple with modern examples of hip-hop and the various issues it is wrought with. The session will purposely allot room for discussion and debate. These topics are controversial, current, and confrontational, likely sparking spirited discussion. Relevant short articles and essays dealing with the many viewpoints and schools of thought will be read. Dissection of said readings will immediately follow.

**Hour 1:** Introduce the remaining areas of examination for our course. Introduce selected, short chapters and essays from Watkins' *Hip Hop Matters* and the Cepeda's *And It Don't Stop*. Said chapters deal with higher-level issues and students should be aware of their multi-dimensional aspects. They will read said chapters as homework following this session. Students will take out books as the instructor briefly introduces the following chapters. From *Hip Hop Matters*:

- 'Remixing American Pop'
- 'Fear Of A White Planet'
- 'Young Voices In The Hood'
- 'Bigger Than Hip-Hop'

From *And It Don't Stop*:

- 'What The White Boy Means When He Says Yo'
- 'Foxy Brown Is The Illest'

- ‘Don’t Hate Me Because I’m Ghetto Fabulous’

**Hour 2:** Students will have completed their book review on *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and are now equipped for informed discussions of race, gender, violence, power structures and sex within hip-hop culture. The class will be divided into small groups where they will discuss their book reviews with one another. Instructor will circulate the classroom, making sure proper discussions are taking place and facilitating dialogue when needed. At this point in the semester, high order questions will be the main focal point. Following 30 minutes of small group discussion, the class will reconvene, arranging desks into a circular fashion and sharing their thoughts aloud. Below are essential questions to guide and mediate discussion:

- What misconceptions did you have about hip-hop that the book clarified?
- Why do you think the book infused so much political and social history when explaining the history of hip-hop itself? What major events or themes kept reoccurring throughout the 1970s and 1980s that aided hip-hop’s own rise?
- Of the pioneers we touched on; who do you think is the most important and why? It does not necessarily have to be a major figure to have made an impact.
- Somebody explain the rise and issues in regards to graffiti and breakdancing? How did each element help and hurt hip-hop during its early history. How have those elements changed? How are they still the same?
- Describe the trends that rapping that occurred throughout its lifespan. How did the style change in terms of delivery? How did it change in terms content? What conditions—business wise and social—may have added to these shifts in content?

- Who are some of the artists in each respective element that have helped spread their respective element on the international level. What specifically did they do?
- **Hour 2:** Briefly conclude *Can't Stop Won't Stop* and clarify for students if need be. Note that throughout the course, no definitive opinions or conclusions about issues within hip-hop were addressed. This was purposeful. Students were to learn the history of hip-hop, its trends and incarnations without any outside influence with the hope that they will have come to some conclusions on their own. Have certain students share portions of their book review as well.

**Hour 3:** We will discuss the readings aloud as a class. The various issues discussed are slightly open-ended, encouraging discussion and student reaction. There are no definitive correct is incorrect answer, but there is substantial literature and media which focuses on these various issues. Students will take notes on during discussion, which then can be used for the final in-class examination. Some of the main topics, questions, and reference points for said lecture are:

- The issue of violence must be addressed. Violence is not only depicted in the music but reinforced in reality as well. Are these lyrics and images glorifying violence? Or do the artists have a right to describe the surroundings and images they actually endured? Is it acceptable when the lyrics are fictional rather than factual?
- Was the press justified in targeting hip-hop in the 1990s? What were their motivations? Did the politicians of the era have the same motivating factors?

- Legitimization within hip-hop: is it a black art? Who owns hip-hop? Compare the history of hip-hop to other African American arts—I.E. R&B, Rock, Soul, etc.—and how the histories parallel.
- How is the image of women represented in hip-hop? What are reasons behind this gender gap? Are these images hurtful to women and young girls?
- The gender gap between male and female performers in rap is quite large. Why is it so different when compared to other music genres? We have heard audio examples of rap songs by women. What were their themes and attire like in the 1980s and 1990s? How did they differ the image of women rappers of nowadays?
- Multi-culturalism in hip-hop will be addressed. What certain elements of hip-hop have certain minorities gravitated towards? What are some of the reasons behind this? How does this conflict with notions of authenticity in hip-hop?
- The white-rappers that appeared in the 1990s all had specific characterizations of what white rappers should be like. What were some of these? What are some of the motivations behind their lyrics and images?
- Hip-hop is now a worldwide phenomenon, with growing movements in remote locations all over the globe. What are some of these reasons for this? What are the conditions in some of these areas? Do any of these conditions parallel hip-hop's original rise?

**Debriefing:** We are reaching the conclusion of the semester with only two sessions left.

We have successfully focused on hip-hop's history and its overall importance and uniqueness as an American art form. The next session will be a continuation of these

notions and allotting time for the upcoming final examination. Students are to read 'Remixing American Pop' and 'We Love Hip-Hop, But Does Hip-Hop Love Us?' from the Watkins book for homework in addition to said readings debriefed in the first hour of this session.



## WEEK 12

### **Daily Course Objective:**

Students will continue to focus on important issues regarding hip-hop and examine its complexities further in-depth. More audio examples of important recordings will also be played. Students will respond immediately following each recording is heard. Apply information and history examined thus far towards these broader, more complex, and even polarizing issues regarding hip-hop.

**Hour 1:** We will continue to examine and discuss what is problematic in hip-hop, connecting past readings and our current focus on specific issues. Questions to mediate and guide discussion are below:

- How are limited images of masculinity adding to a culture of violence? What are some of these images? Have they changed throughout the course of hip-hop's history?
- How has hip-hop proven itself to be very homophobic? What has it done to reverse those trends? Has it helped? Is the music itself to blame or are there bigger factors at work?
- How is misogyny within hip-hop played out? What kinds of images have successful female rappers had to employ? Are they to blame? Are different women of color portrayed differently? How so?
- What is the culture of 'music videos'? What kinds of images are depicted in these videos? Does the artist have the right to do so without any responsibility for the images portrayed? Who else besides the artist(s) can be blamed for this?

- In what ways have the media aided these images of men and women and violence without bearing any responsibility?
- What about the lyrics do you think is both inspiring and irresponsible? Be specific.

We will now hear some older examples of controversial hip-hop recordings as well as current songs that have garnered negative criticism. Following each recording, we will discuss the song, the lyrics, how it struck the students, and whether reactions to the music are justified.

- ‘911’s A Joke’ by Public Enemy
- ‘Cop Killer’ by Ice T
- ‘Bitches Ain’t Shit’ by Snoop Dog
- ‘White America’ by Eminem
- ‘Me So Horny’ by 2 Live Crew
- ‘Fuck The Police’ by NWA
- ‘Mind Of A Lunatic’ by Geto Boys

**Hour 2:** Positive examples of intelligent, anti-violent rap songs will be played in order to counterbalance the negative, controversial songs above. Students will listen and respond aloud after each recording. Following our audio exercise, discussion will examine positive rap songs have been praised through the years.

- ‘Fight The Power’ by Public Enemy
- ‘Erase Racism’ by Big Daddy Kane and Biz Markie

- ‘Makeshift Patriot’ by Sage Francis
- ‘Thieves In The Night’ By Blackstarr
- ‘B.I.B.L.E. (Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth)’ by Killah Priest
- ‘I Used To Love H.E.R.’ by Common Sense
- ‘I Can’ by Nas
- ‘Thinking Of A Master Plan’ by AZ
- ‘Excursions’ by A Tribe Called Quest

Following the audio exercise, we will discuss and raise questions about the more positive elements that have developed as a result of hip-hop. Some questions to guide discussion are below:

- What are some of the main themes heard in the songs above? In what ways do you think they have not changed much through the years? In what way are they different?
- Why do you think hip-hop is less positive than it used to be? Who are to blame? Is it solely the artists’ fault? Why or why not?
- How has hip-hop become more multi-cultural through the years? Cite some examples we have learned about. What regions across the world currently have sprouting hip-hop scenes?
- What are the conditions like in all these areas where hip-hop has organically grown from? What are the differences and similarities? Why do you think hip-hop is the preferred mode of expression rather than other musical forms?

- How are some of hip-hop's lyrics similar to poetry? How are some unlike what is normally considered poetic?
- How do you think hip-hop can be a tool for bringing about change? How has it made positive impacts on other cultures besides the US? Use specific examples.
- What have been some moments that we have examined that struck you as important American history?
- What are some of the glaring themes of today's current hip-hop? How are these themes different than how it used to be? How are they similar? What direction or directions do you see hip-hop taking into the future?

**Hour 3:** With the remaining time, we will prepare for the final examination to be held during the next session. Below are terms that students need to know. Take the remainder of the session to clarify details students might not fully understand. Below are terms from the second half of the course that students must be familiar with. This will be passed out on a sheet of paper as a study guide of sorts.

- Chuck D
- Russell Simmons
- Def Jam
- 'The Black Belt'
- Rakim
- 'Rap's Coltrane'
- Master Of Ceremonies
- 'The Message'

- King Tim III
- ‘Culture of Music Videos’
- Eric Wright
- West Coast Rap
- ‘The Breaks’
- 5 % Nation
- The Source
- Grand Wizard Theodore
- Misogyny
- Politics of Authenticity
- Ice-T
- Legitimization
- Clinton Administration
- Ruthless Records
- Parallels to other Black Music
- Gender Gap
- Global Hip-Hop Movements
- Homophobia
- Hyper-masculinity

**Debriefing:** The semester has essentially come to a close. Students are well versed in hip-hop’s history, cultural impact, internal issues, globalization and various transformations. There will be cumulative portions on the exam, as well as areas focusing on the latter half of the course. Like the mid-term examination, the final

examination will also be in-class, short questions and answers. No books, aids, or study guides will be allowed. There will be some time to prepare at the beginning of the next session as well as a closing lecture and discussion.

## WEEK 13

### **Daily Course Objective:**

This final session will allow students 30 minutes to review and clarify with the instructor regarding the course's cumulative coursework, readings, and all media components. Students will have 2 full hours to complete the final examination. Following said 2 hours, 30 minutes will be allotted for open for a closing discussion and overall wrap up of the semester.

**Hour 1 and 2:** The beginning 30 minutes of the first hour will be free time for students to study and refine their notes if need be. Instructor will circle the classroom, addressing any questions the students might have. The examination questions follow a similar format as the mid-term; 10 short answer questions with partial credit possibly given. Students will cite examples from readings, films, audio, lecture and discussion. Students will have 2 full hours and are encouraged to take the entire time allotted. The questions for the final examination are below and will be passed out on a sheet of paper:

- 1) In full detail, describe all of hip-hop's four elements. Describe the development of each, its respective pioneers, and how they're interconnected to one another. Be sure to include how each element helped or hurt hip-hop at various stages in its development. Be very specific.
- 2) What are the social, political, and economic conditions that hip-hop arose from? Compare and contrast that environment to Jamaica in the 1960s. What are some

of the other conditions where hip-hop have arisen from? Use specific examples.

Why do you think this is so?

- 3) Compare hip-hop's history to other African American forms of music. How has the public reaction as well as the recording industry been similar throughout history? How is hip-hop's acceptance in popular culture mirror other genres such as R&B and Soul? Talk about the historical—and audio—influence that these other genres have had on hip-hop? What are some of the reasons you think this is so?
- 4) Explain in detail the various stages of rap lyrics throughout the years. What are the reasons for the shift in certain themes and styles? Who was the target audience in the beginning and how did this change in the 1990s? Be detailed, name specific artists and recordings. What are all the encompassing components that influenced rap lyrics? Is it merely the artists or are there larger power structures at work?
- 5) In what was is DJing or turntablism the foundational pillar on which hip-hop is ultimately based around? What specific recordings have aided the transition from DJing into other aspects of hip-hop? Who are some of the pioneering figures of the movement? How has turntablism progressed as an art form when compared to the early 1980s?
- 6) In what ways is hip-hop very inviting of other cultures? In what ways is hip-hop very multi-ethnic? In what other ways does hip-hop constrict itself by dismissing other forms of hip-hop? Is this valid? What is the main impetus behind this? Give specific modern examples of hip-hop's lack of exclusivity.



- 7) What are the politics of authenticity? Where do you think these certain viewpoints originate? What does geographical location factor into this? Why is hip-hop, more so than other music genres, so concerned with territory? Is it justified in doing so?
- 8) How are women represented in hip-hop? Discuss specific artists, recordings, styles, and images. How are women visually portrayed in hip-hop music? Has it always been that way? Also, what do you think are the reasons behind the massive gender gap in hip-hop music? Why has this gap grown over time? Who is responsible for this? What mixed messages have been historically projected towards women in hip-hop? Use specific examples from readings and discussions.
- 9) How are men represented in hip-hop? How are certain ethnicities represented in hip-hop? What are the reasons for this? How are these images connected to issues of guns and violence in the music? Why do you think these images continue to prevail when the segments of the hip-hop community have criticized it? Who is responsible for these images? In what ways are they true and in what ways are they fictional? Does it matter whether it's fact or fiction? Who should be held responsible?
- 10) What do you think hip-hop's affect on society and culture have been? How do you think hip-hop's future will play out? Will it die out such as other genres such as the Punk revolution of 1970s and 1980s? What trends in the music do you think will subside and what trends do you think will embolden? Make predictions based on your knowledge so far. There are not right or wrong answers, just insufficient justifications.

**Hour 3:** The final examination will take 2 hours, leaving a half hour to discuss and reflect on the final itself, wrap up the semester, further ingrain important notions about hip-hop to the students, and for final statements and necessary summations. This concludes *Hip-Hop 101: A University Level Course Curriculum For Examining Hip-Hop In The Modern World*.

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